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ABSTRACT

Presented at the Broward County Library (Florida) on September 11, 1984, to coincide with Banned Books Week and to mark the centennial of the "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," the address in this booklet reviews the reasons why this classic book has always been in trouble with the censors. Drawing upon the Pulitzer Prize winning biography, "Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain," the lecture updates the chronology of the banning of "Huck Finn," which began when the Concord Public Library in Massachusetts attacked the book in 1885. (HOD)

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born to trouble

one hundred years of Huckleberry Finn

Justin Kaplan

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born to trouble

one hundred years of Huckleberry Finn

A lecture sponsored by
the Florida Center for the Book
and presented at
the Broward County Library
Fort Lauderdale, Florida
on September 11, 1984

Huckleberry Finn, drawn by E. W. Kemble, 1884, for the first American edition of the novel, published in 1885 by Charles L. Webster and Company in New York.

born to trouble

one hundred years of Huckleberry Finn

Justin Kaplan

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preface

The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, created by a 1977 Act of Congress, stimulates public interest in books, reading, and the written word. The center's programs of symposia, lectures, publications, exhibitions, and other events enhance the role of books in society. These programs are supported by private gifts from individuals and corporations.

This publication is a cooperative endeavor of the new Florida Center for the Book in the Broward County Library and the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. As Cecil Beach, director of the Broward County Library, explains in the foreword, Justin Kaplan's lecture was the Florida's Center's first public program. Commemorating the centennial of the publication of the *Adventures*

of Huckleberry Finn, the lecture was scheduled during Banned Books Week. Justin Kaplan, whose biography *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain* won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award in 1967, is also the author of *Mark Twain and His World* (1974) and of biographies of Lincoln Steffens and Walt Whitman.

It is a pleasure to commend and encourage the good work of the Florida Center for the Book and to look forward to other cooperative efforts. May both our centers flourish!

John Y. Cole
Executive Director, The Center for the Book
in the Library of Congress

foreword

The Florida Center for the Book was established in 1984 by the Broward County Library in cooperation with the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. At the dedication of the new Main Library in Fort Lauderdale, Carol Nemeyer, Associate Librarian for National Programs at the Library of Congress, explained that the two centers for the book have a mutual objective of promoting an appreciation of the role of books in society and a closer relationship between those who create books and those who read them.

The Broward County Library is committed to a strong program of reading promotion and has helped projects inspired by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress reach a Florida audience, particularly "Books Make a Difference" and "A Nation of

Readers." An award-winning weekly television program, "Library Edition," features authors discussing their works and extends the many book-based programs presented by the Broward County Library.

With support from private contributions, the business community, and state and federal grants, the Florida Center for the Book sponsors lectures, exhibits, and publications. Justin Kaplan's address was the first public program of the Florida Center for the Book. Presented on September 11, 1984, to coincide with Banned Books Week, it also marked the centennial of the publication of the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Mr. Kaplan reviewed the reasons why this classic has always been in trouble with the censors. Drawing upon his own Pulitzer Prize-winning biography, *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain*, Kaplan updated the chronology of the banning of *Huck Finn*, which began when the Concord Public Library in Massachusetts attacked the book in 1885. Mark Twain himself would likely have appreciated the irony that recently an effort was made to ban the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* from the Mark Twain Elementary School in Fairfax County, Virginia.

This lecture was presented in Fort Lauderdale at a time when the Broward County Library itself was under attack for its subscription to *Playboy* magazine. The speaker therefore felt that this was a particularly appropriate time to alert people to the dangers of all types of censorship.

It is a pleasure to issue this lecture as a joint publication with the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. The Broward County Library acknowledges the support of the Ruffner Foundation and the Florida Endowment for the Humanities in cooperation with the National Endowment for the Humanities in making the original program possible.

Cecil Beach
Director, Broward County Library
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

born to trouble:
one hundred years of **Huckleberry Finn**

"I am tearing along on a new book," Mark Twain told friends in the summer of 1876. "It is Huck Finn's Autobiography. I like it only tolerably well, as far as I have got, and may possibly pigeonhole or burn the MS when it is done." He wrote about one third of the book then, coming to a full stop at the point in the story where Huck and Jim, an outcast boy and a fugitive slave, pass Cairo, Illinois, in the night. They had planned to sell their raft there, get on a steamboat, and go up the Ohio River to the Free States. Instead, confused by a heavy fog, they continue down the Mississippi into the heart of the slave-holding South. They have no plausible reason for going where they do except, perhaps, for Mark Twain's own familiarity with the region. As Huck himself asks, Why would a runaway slave "run South?"

The serious, perhaps insoluble plot problems Mark Twain created for himself compelled him to put the manuscript aside for several years. He worked on it again in 1879 or 1880 and got stuck a second time. In 1884, eight years after he started *Huckleberry Finn*, he told his English publisher, "I've just finished writing a book, and modesty compels me to say it's a rattling good one, too." But whether he solved his plot problems even then remains doubtful.

In the final chapters Tom Sawyer shows up at the Phelps plantation in northern Louisiana, helps steal Jim out of slavery, and then tells us that Jim has been a free man all along. This ending, which makes up roughly a quarter of the entire book, has become the center of a continuing critical debate. Ernest Hemingway said that "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*. . . . the best book we've had," but even Hemingway thought that readers ought to stop eleven chapters short for the end. "The rest," he said, "is just cheating." T. S. Eliot and Lionel Trilling were able to live with Mark Twain's ending. Others think he ought to have been shot for it. Professor John Seelye has written his own version, *The True Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1970), in order to satisfy the critics. "And now that they've got their book," Seelye says, "maybe they'll leave the other one alone."

Mark Twain's long and painful process of creation gives a peculiar force to Huck's concluding words—"There ain't nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it, because if I'd a knowed what trouble it was to make a book I wouldn't a tackled it."

The trouble, however, did not end with the writing. *Century* magazine, which published excerpts in advance of book publication, insisted on deleting references to nakedness, dead cats, and the like. To bring out *Huckleberry Finn* Mark Twain set up his own publishing house and, by entering business on a large scale, prepared the way for his bankruptcy ten years later. As author-publisher, he displayed the extremest genteel severity in reviewing the illustrations by E. W. Kemble. He faulted some of them for being "forbidding" or "repulsive." One, which showed a "lecherous old rascal" kissing a girl at the camp meeting in Chapter 20, had to go altogether: "Let's not make any pictures of the camp-

meeting. The subject won't bear illustrating. It is a disgusting thing." But despite Mark Twain's vigilance, an engraver at the printing plant in New York—his identity was never discovered—added a mischievous last-minute detail, a slight bulge at the fly, that drastically altered the meaning of an otherwise inoffensive picture of Uncle Silas with Aunt Sally. The offending plate was cut out by hand and replaced in the 30,000-copy first printing, but the resulting delay meant that the book missed the 1884 Christmas trade and went on sale in the United States about two months after it did in England and Canada. At stake, a spokesman for the publishing house declared, was the author's reputation for "decency and morality," a reputation that was soon to be put to more severe tests. Meanwhile, Mark Twain launched an unavailing lawsuit against a firm of booksellers, described by him as "thieves and swindlers," who were offering *Huckleberry Finn* at a reduced price. And finally, just when "I am not able to see anything that can save Huck Finn from being another defeat," the trustees of the Concord (Massachusetts) Public Library expelled the book from their shelves as "trash and suitable only for the slums." Their reasoning, summarized as follows by a Boston newspaper, proved to be somewhat—but far from totally—representative of official opinion elsewhere in the country:

> It deals with a series of adventures of a very low grade of morality; it is couched in the language of a rough dialect, and all through its pages there is a systematic use of bad grammar and an employment of rough, coarse, inelegant expressions. It is also very irreverent. To sum up, the book is flippant and irreverent in its style. It deals with a series of experiences that are certainly not elevating. The whole book is of a class that is more profitable for the slums than it is for respectable people, and it is trash of the veriest sort.

"That will sell 25,000 copies for us sure," Mark Twain said, calculating the beneficial effects of excommunication. "For instance, it will deter other libraries from buying the book and you are doubtless aware that one book in a public library prevents the sale of a sure ten and a possible hundred of its mates. And secondly it will cause the purchasers of the book to read it, out of curiosity, instead

of merely intending to do so after the usual way of the world and library committees; and then they will discover, to my great advantage and their own indignant disappointment, that there is nothing objectionable in the book, after all."

Huckleberry Finn may have been the first book to become a best-seller because it was banned in Massachusetts, but the banning of an American book of indisputable literary quality was far from being the last instance of its sort. One has only to think of the troubled history of Stephen Crane's *Maggie* and of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy*. Today, books by J. D. Salinger, Bernard Malamud, and Kurt Vonnegut are targets for the vigilance committees, along with *The American Heritage Dictionary*. No longer merely random, local, or idiosyncratic, book banning today is political, organized, and therefore more menacing than ever.

"Those idiots in Concord are not a court of last resort," Mark Twain said, "and I am not disturbed by their moral gymnastics." Still, he remained hurt and puzzled by the reception of his masterpiece, a favorite child who had brought disgrace upon his father. As novelist, humorist, and satirist he most often stood in opposition to the genteel tradition, but as private citizen, family man, and prominent householder of Hartford, Connecticut, he courted acceptance and respectability; he would have been ashamed to be classed with his older contemporary, the reprobate poet, Walt Whitman of Camden, New Jersey. But just four years earlier another work that today represents America and American culture to the entire world, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, had also been banned. The Boston district attorney, egged on by some of the same people who later ostracized *Huckleberry Finn*, warned Whitman's publishers there that *Leaves of Grass*, dismissed by one early reviewer as "a mass of stupid filth," fell "within the provisions of the Public Statutes respecting obscene literature." He suggested to them "the propriety of withdrawing the same from circulation and suppressing the editions thereof." The publishers in Boston retreated. Whitman, who after a quarter of a century in the doghouse had almost become resigned to this sort of thing, took his book to another firm, this time in Philadelphia. As a consequence

of having been banned in Boston, *Leaves of Grass* even enjoyed a mild flurry of sales.

In the aftermath of the Concord expulsion of *Huckleberry Finn* Mark Twain was more certain than ever that there was no such thing as a unitary audience in America. Perhaps only seeking to make the best of a bad situation, he declared that he had always written for "the mighty mass of the uncultivated," for "the Belly and the Members" instead of "for the Head." "Indeed I have been misjudged from the very first," he told Andrew Lang, an English critic who regarded *Huck* as "nothing less than a masterpiece," the "great American novel." "I have never tried in even one single instance to help cultivate the cultivated classes. I was not equipped for it, either by native gifts or training. And I never had any ambition in that direction, but always hunted for bigger game—the masses."

By now a fixture among the classics of world literature, *Huckleberry Finn* clearly has reached "the masses." They have read it in English, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Hebrew, and practically every other tongue spoken on the globe. A 1960 estimate put the cumulative sales of the book at ten million copies, but that was some time ago. (The current total might be closer to fifteen million.) This country alone has about forty editions in print, including the splendid omnibus volume in the Library of America series. But at the same time, as the ongoing critical debate suggests, *Huckleberry Finn* has also become the property of the lettered classes, who have turned it into a sort of fresh-water *Moby Dick*.

H. L. Mencken recalled that his discovery of *Huckleberry Finn* in 1889, when he was only nine years old and the book only four, was "probably the most stupendous event of my whole life.... If I undertook to tell you the effect it had upon me my talk would sound frantic, and even delirious." For Mencken, Mark Twain was "the true father of our national literature, the first genuinely American artist of the blood royal." In *Huckleberry Finn*, said T. S. Eliot, Mark Twain reveals himself to be one of those rare writers "who have brought their language up to date," and "who have discovered a new way of writing, valid not only for themselves, but for others." In some way his book has shaped the style and vision of virtually

every American writer, including Sherwood Anderson, Dreiser, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Salinger, and Bellow, in addition to Hemingway. By elevating Huck's vernacular speech to the level of literature, Mark Twain advanced a cultural as well as a literary revolution.

Huckleberry Finn is a relatively rare example, in a divided culture, of a work of high literary art that is cherished by both the "cultivated" and the "uncultivated classes," as Mark Twain distinguished them—by the "Head" as well as "the Belly and the Members." Even so, this novel has never been out of hot water with official or self-appointed guardians of public taste and morality, especially where the young and impressionable are involved. "When a library expels a book of mine," Mark Twain said, "and leaves an unexpurgated Bible around where unprotected youth and age can get hold of it, the deep unconscious irony of it delights me and doesn't anger me."

During the twenty-five years of life remaining to him after the publication of *Huckleberry Finn*, he had many such occasions to enjoy the "deep unconscious irony" of actual or threatened expulsion—from the library of the New York State Reformatory, the Denver Public Library, the Omaha Public Library, the Brooklyn Public Library. The reasons variously given were that the book was "immoral and sacrilegious," put "wrong ideas in youngsters' heads," and set "a bad example." A writer in *Library Journal* for July 1907 reported that each year *Huck* was banned somewhere in the United States (the title of his article was, "The Children's Librarian versus *Huckleberry Finn*"). In 1931 Harper and Brothers published an expurgated edition for elementary and junior high school students. The editors claimed that their bobtailed version would "let Huck . . . step down from his place on the library shelf and enter the classroom," thereby providing "wholesome happiness for boys and girls," and stimulating "even the most apathetic and difficult pupils." In 1957 the New York City Board of Education removed *Huck* from its list of approved texts. In 1976 a comparable action was taken in the high schools of the state of Illinois.

What is it in this universally admired book that offends so many people? Why is Huck always in hot water? Why must he always put "civilization" behind him and light out for the Territory?

Chapter III.

MISS WATSON'S LECTURE.

WELL, I got a good going-over in the morning, from old Miss Watson, on account of my clothes; but the widow she didn't scold, but only cleaned off the grease and clay, and looked so sorry that I thought I would behave a while if I could. Then Miss Watson she took me in the closet and prayed, but nothing come of it. She told me to pray every day, and whatever I asked for I would get it. But it warn't so. I tried it. Once I got a fish-line, but no hooks. It warn't any good to me without hooks. I tried for the hooks three or four times, but somehow I couldn't make it work. By-and-by, one day, I asked Miss Watson to try for me, but she said I was a fool. She never told me why, and I couldn't make it out no way.

I set down, one time, back in the woods, and had a long think about it. I says to myself, if a body can get anything

"Miss Watson's Lecture," drawn by E. W. Kemble to open chapter 3.

Many early readers found Mark Twain's great novel objectionable because it violated genteel standards of social and literary decorum. Instead of refined language, an exemplary hero, and an elevating moral they encountered a narrative written in the idiom of a shiftless, unlettered boy from the lowest class of Southern white society. This should not have come as a complete surprise to them. Huck had been introduced nearly ten years earlier, in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, as a "juvenile pariah...cordially hated and dreaded by all the mothers of the town, because he was idle, and lawless, and vulgar and bad....He slept on door-steps in fine weather and in empty hogsheads in wet." But now this outcast, son of the town drunkard, instead of being one of Tom Sawyer's many playmates, was the sole hero-narrator of a book that ridiculed the work ethic, polite manners, the Bible, prayer, and pious sentiments in general, characterized as "tears and flapdoodle," "soul-butter and hogwash." In addition to the camp meeting, Huck's story included an obscene stage performance, "The Royal Nonesuch," described by the duke as "ruther worse than low comedy" and featuring a naked man cavorting on all fours.

Offensive as they seemed at the time, these violations of decorum only screened a deeper level of threat and affront. *Huckleberry Finn*, Lionel Trilling said, is "a subversive book." No one who responds to its hero's internal struggles over right and wrong, freedom and slavery, humanity and racism, will ever again be certain that what appear to be "clear dictates of moral reason are not merely the engrained customary beliefs" of a particular place and time. The questions that Huck and Jim pose go to the very heart of the social contract and our faith in public opinion as a guide to conduct.

Twenty years after he finished *Huckleberry Finn* Mark Twain described its central and constitutive irony: "A sound heart and a deformed conscience come into collision and conscience suffers defeat." Huck's "deformed conscience" is the internalized voice of public opinion, of a conventional wisdom that found nothing wrong in the institution of slavery and held as mortal sin any attempt to subvert it. Conscience, as Mark Twain remembered from his boyhood in a slaveholding society, "can be trained to

approve any wild thing you want it to approve if you begin its education early and stick to it." Huck knows that Tom Sawyer, "with his bringing-up," would never be able to set a slave free. But Huck eventually recognizes slavery for the "wild thing" it was. He follows the dictates of his sound heart and commits a sin as well as a crime by helping Jim to run away from his legal owner. "All right, then, I'll go to hell," Huck says. "It was awful thoughts, and awful words, but they was said. And I let them stay said; and never thought no more about reforming." Like Thoreau and Captain John Brown, Huck rejects what he considers to be an unjust and immoral law. He also rejects the craving for social approval that, according to Mark Twain, motivates the behavior of most of us. He is happy to remain a pariah. His story satirizes a number of beliefs sacred to Americans, consensual wisdom, for example, and the primacy of the average man. "Do I know you!" Colonel Sherburn says when he faces down the lynch mob. "I know you clear through. I was born and raised in the South, and I've lived in the North; so I know the average all around. The average man's a coward." "Hain't we got all the fools in town on our side!" asks the king. "And ain't that a big enough majority, in any town!"

Guided by sound hearts rather than deformed consciences, Huck and Jim passed through agonies of remorse that are their own particular hells. Jim rebukes Huck: "Trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed." "I didn't do him no more mean tricks," says Huck, "and I wouldn't done that one if I'd a knowed it would make him feel that way." Jim remembers committing an inadvertent act of cruelty to his own daughter: "De Lord God Almighty fogive po' ole Jim, kaze he never gwyne to fogive hisself as long's he live!" Seeking only self-approval, not the approval of others, the white pariah boy and the black runaway slave, "a community of saints," achieve a state of near-prefect intimacy and equality on their raft, fragile island of freedom between two shores of society. "What you want, above all things, on a raft," Huck says, "is for everybody to be satisfied, and feel right and kind towards the others." Perhaps another of the affronts that Mark Twain's novel offered and continues to offer is that his two outcasts are a silent reproach to dry-land society. They

are simply too good for us, too truthful, too loyal, too passionate, and, in a profounder sense than the one we feel easy with, too moral.

Banning is one way of dealing with this profound affront. Another way is denial. Americans of Mark Twain's time and somewhat after tended to cherish him as a nostalgic recorder of boyhood high-jinks, a genial, harmless entertainer. As soon as the smiles faded from their faces they trivialized his genius and irony, his dark vision of humanity, and his moral passion. We see the same process of lollypopping and willful expropriation of cultural resources in I.B.M.'s current advertising campaign for their Personal Computer: it converts Charlie Chaplin, victim of the machine and of Modern Times, into his ideological antithesis, a smiling, even simpering, totem of post-industrial society.

There is one especially bitter irony in the career of *Huckleberry Finn*. This novel, a savage indictment of a society that accepted slavery as a way of life, nevertheless has come under attack in our time for its alleged "racism." In 1957, for example, the N.A.A.C.P. condemned the book as "racially offensive." Such charges have supported exclusionary actions taken in many other states. In 1982 an administrator at the Mark Twain Intermediate School in Fairfax County, Virginia, called it "the most grotesque example of racism I've ever seen in my life." In 1984 school officials in Waukegan, Illinois, removed *Huckleberry Finn* from the required reading list after an alderman, according to the Associated Press, "objected to the book's use of the word 'nigger.'" It seems unlikely that anyone, of any color, who had actually read *Huckleberry Finn*, instead of merely reading or hearing about it, and who had allowed himself or herself even the barest minimum of intelligent response to its underlying spirit and intention, could accuse it of being "racist" because some of its characters use offensive racial epithets. These characters belong to their place and time, which is the Mississippi Valley thirty years before Emancipation.

As a historical portrait of slaveholding society, Mark Twain's novel is probably more faithful as well as less stereotypical than Harriet Beecher Stowe's beloved *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. And it is worth recalling that Mrs. Stowe, like most of her fellow abolitionists, believed that there was no place for free blacks in American

society—they advocated colonization and repatriation to Africa. Mark Twain, "the most desouthernized of southerners," according to his friend William Dean Howells, believed that it was henceforward the duty of white people to make amends for the crime of slavery. He may have been the least "racist" of all the major writers of his time, Herman Melville excepted. *Huckleberry Finn* is a matchless satire on racism, bigotry, and property rights in human beings.

Jim considers hiring an Abolitionist to steal his two children from their owner. "It most froze me to hear such talk," says Huck. Here was Jim, whom "I had as good as helped run away, coming right out flat-footed and saying he would steal his children—children that belonged to a man I didn't even know; a man that hadn't ever done me no harm." Here is Aunt Sally's response to a steamboat explosion as described by Huck: " 'Good gracious! anybody hurt!' 'No'm. Killed a nigger.' 'Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt.' " One has to be deliberately dense to miss the point Mark Twain is making here and to construe such passages as evidences of his "racism." Jim, unquestionably the best person in the book, reflects the author's affection, humanity, and moral passion. "I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind," Huck says. "I'd see him standing my watch on top his'n, stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog; and when I come to him again in the swamp, up there where the feud was; and such-like times; and would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was."

Mark Twain "told the truth, mainly," Huck says in the opening of the novel. "There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth." ("Truth is the most valuable thing we have," says the author himself, speaking in another voice. "Let us economize it.") Huck confronts a corrupt adult world through a series of day-to-day yarns, stretchers, and downright lies, but he himself is ultimately and unflinchingly truthful. "You can't pray a lie," he says. "I found that out." Much of this great book's power to offend as well as endure derives from a commitment to truth-telling and to a frequently brutal, painful realism. Huck and Jim live on their raft

Chapter XII

ON THE RAFT.

must a been close on to one o'clock when we got below the island at last, and the raft did seem to go mighty slow. If a boat was to come along, we was going to take to the canoe and break for the Illinois shore; and it was well a boat didn't come, for we hadn't ever thought to put the gun into the canoe, or a fishing-line or anything to eat. We was in rather too much of a sweat to think of so many things. It warn't good judgment to put *everything* on the raft.

If the men went to the island, I just expect they found the camp fire I built, and watched it all night for Jim to come. Anyways, they stayed away from us, and if my building the fire never fooled them it warn't no fault of mine. I played it as low-down on them as I could.

When the first streak of day begun to show, we tied up to a tow-head in a big bend on the Illinois side, and hacked off

Jim and Huck on the raft.

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because they are on the run from a nightmare society driven by bigotry, violence, exploitation, greed, ignorance, and a sort of pandemic depravity. The most conspicuous white inhabitants of the Mississippi Valley are swindlers, drunkards, hypocrites, lunkheads, fools, rapscallions, deadbeats, bounty hunters, and trigger-happy psychopaths.

At first Huck appears almost to be matter-of-fact about the horrors he meets up with. "Pap got too handy with his hick'ry, and I couldn't stand it," he tells us. "I was all over welts. . . . Once he locked me in and was gone three days." Pap drinks himself into an attack of delirium tremens, confuses Huck with the Angel of Death, and tries to kill him with a clasp-knife. When Pap collapses in a stupor, Huck waits out the night behind a loaded rifle pointed at his father. Having considered the possibility of patricide, the boy instead simulates his own murder and escapes. Soon after, Pap is killed in a brawl.

By the time Huck finds himself a witness to the feud between the Shephersons and Grangerfords, he is no longer even remotely matter-of-fact. This is his account of the feud's bloody climax. "All of a sudden, bang! bang! bang! goes three or four guns—the men had slipped around through the woods and come in from behind without their horses! The boys jumped for the river—both of them hurt—and as they swum down the current the men run along the bank shooting at them and singing out, 'Kill them kill them!' It made me so sick I most fell out of the tree. I ain't agoing to tell all that happened—it would make me sick again if I was to do that. I wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night, to see such things. I ain't ever going to get shut of them—lots of times I dream about them." He can't wait to "get out of that awful country."

In the course of his long journey along the shores of "that awful country," Huck sees other murders. One of them is committed in broad daylight on the main street of a river town where the loafers generally entertain themselves with milder spectacles. "There couldn't anything wake them up all over, and make them happy all over, like a dog-fight," Huck says, "unless it might be putting turpentine on a stray dog and setting fire to him, or tying a tin pan to his tail and see him run himself to death." The same village

loafers form the lynch mob that swarms up the street toward Colonel Sherburn's house "a-whooping and yelling and raging like Injuns." Much later Huck sees the king and duke, tarred and feathered, being ridden out of another town. There is nothing comic about this punishment. "I see they had the king and duke astraddle of a rail—that is, I knowed it was the king and the duke, though they was all over tar and feathers, and didn't look like nothing in the world that was human—just looked like a couple of monstrous big soldier-plumes. Well, it made me sick to see it." Like the heroes of many more recent American novels Huck is often sickened by what he sees. "It was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race," he says. "I never see anything so disgusting."

When Mark Twain followed his two heroes South into pain, disgust, and danger, he did more than create a plot problem. Symbolically he enacted and predicted the dilemma of the humorist, a punishing profession in several senses. The human race, says Mark Twain's Satan, has only "one really effective weapon—laughter. Power, money, persuasion, supplication, persecution—these can lift at a colossal humbug—push it a little—weaken it a little, century by century—but only laughter can blow it to rags and atoms at a blast. Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand." But, as Satan concludes, this is a weapon that requires of its user "sense and courage," for humor when pressed to its extreme goes beyond the pleasure principle. "Weapon," "blast," "assault"—these are some of Mark Twain's ways of nailing down the essential action of humor. He also compares the action of humor to the "delicious" surprise of the dentist's drill striking the raw nerve. One of the funniest things about humor is that people don't take it seriously enough. If they did they might discover that, at heart, great humorists are not merry as crickets, but quite the contrary. Enduring humor is not kindly, not harmless. It has the power to inflict pain, even commit mayhem, and unless it exercises this power is not likely to endure.

Mark Twain's vocation, as he announced when he was thirty years old, was "to excite the laughter of God's creatures." But he discovered this to be a difficult and dangerous undertaking.

"Humor must not professedly teach and it must not professedly preach," he said, "but it must do both if it would live forever" (by "forever" he means thirty years or more). From the day he chose his vocation to the day he died he felt compelled to defend humor, to free the noun "humorist" from the adjective "mere" and the synonym "clown." To do this he ventured into ever darker, ever more complex and punishing modes. One theorist of humor, Henri Bergson, says that laughter depends upon "a momentary anaesthesia of the heart" and therefore "has no greater foe than emotion." *Huckleberry Finn*, however, not only inflicts pain but challenges us to feel and laugh at the same time. Perhaps Mark Twain asks too much of us. Perhaps it is in the very nature of humor as he defined it that, like Huck, its outcast hero, Mark Twain's century-old masterpiece was born to trouble.

THE END. YOUR TRULY, HUCK FINN.

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